**Author’s Interview for adelaidebooks.org**

1**.Tell us a bit about yourself – something that we will not find in the official author’s bio?**

I didn’t start writing poems until after I was thirty, after college, marriage and the birth of four daughters, when a friend and I wandered into a poetry reading at the local library. Reading led to writing poems, studying in community workshops, and then later taking workshops in the MFA program at Indiana University while I worked on a doctorate in instructional systems technology. I often felt behind compared to others who began writing and entered writing programs earlier in their lives.

2. **Do you remember what was your first story (article, essay or poem) about and when did you write it?**

While I was in high school, I worked during my lunch hour in the office of the head of the English department. She asked me to enter an essay contest hosted by the National Council of Teachers of English. As usual I struggled with what to write about and instead ended up writing an essay about struggling to figure out what to write about. Of the essay, I only remember the drama of the midnight hour, and the images of erasures and discarded sheets of paper, from the days when writing was physically putting pen to paper. The essay won a prize, a Roget’s Thesaurus.

3. **What is the title of your latest book and what inspired it?**

The title poem of the collection, *Charm and Strange,*  was inspired by the language used by physicists I encountered as I was reading an obituary in the *New York Times* for Richard Taylor, a physicist who had won the 1990 Nobel Prize for his work with quarks. In physics, a quark is a fundamental particle; there are three pairs of quarks named *top* and *bottom*, *up* and *down*, and *charm* and *strange*.

4. **How long did it take you to write your latest work and how fast do you write (how many words daily)?**

The poems in this collection were written and some published in small press journals between 2010 and 2019. I usually work through multiple drafts of a poem before it is finished over a period of several months.

5. **Do you have any unusual writing habits?**

Tillie Olsen is said to have “seized any free moment to write,” while she was on the bus, while the children slept, while she was ironing. She wondered about the silences and gaps in her writing. I was also raising four daughters for six years as a single mother, and I have always written in the margins of the day, wherever they appeared, often at night when the house was quiet. I have also wondered about the gaps in between.

6. **Is writing the only form of artistic expression that you utilize, or is there more to your creativity than just writing?**

Until the last ten years of her life, I had a complicated relationship with my mother, an artist. I have sometimes written about her depression and alcoholism as well as her vision and images. She worked in oils, clay, as well as multimedia including fabric collages, like the one I remember best of Adam and Eve. Her pieces were often shown in local and touring ecclesiastical arts shows.

My relationship with my mother spilled over into how I felt about painting and sculpture. Over the years, I felt an inclination to paint but never pursued it. Finally, my husband, who paints, sketches and writes, gave me a watercolor class as a birthday gift and took the class with me. Watercolor was still intimidating, but I loved it for transparency and color. I continue to function at the “remedial” level of watercolor but find it infinitely alluring.

When my mother came to live in Alabama, I registered both of us for a sculpture class, run by a renowned sculptor working with clay. My mother was polite about the class but not passionate. I, however, was completely captivated by dimension, being able to turn the piece I was working on at a different angle and discover something new about it. In that class I began to learn about armature and adding and forming clay to achieve a result. Since then, I have been learning to work with chunks of basswood to take away wood to form an animal, most often a carousel horse.

7. **Authors that have influenced your writings?**

Shaun Farragher worked as a poet in the schools and taught community workshops where I began to learn. Then I spent a year in MFA workshops at Indiana University with Maura Stanton who remained a touchstone throughout the time I have written. Reading W.S. Merwin was an inspiration and freed me from punctuation. Innumerable other authors continue to influence what I write.

8. **What are you working on right now? Anything new cooking in the wordsmith’s kitchen?**

Right now is a particularly interesting time to be writing, or not writing. Being open to and honoring impulses to poems remain primary for my work. However, the enormity of a pandemic, an economic crash, and pressures for social and economic justice seem to ask for more ambitious poems, poems with a broader scope, but poems that don’t trade off intimacy for politics.

9. **Did you ever think about the profile of your readers? What do you think – who reads and who should read your books?**

Some readers have followed my work over the years. Others favor lyric poetry. In general, poems can fill the soul and who doesn’t need that as we continue to experience the pandemic. Ideally the poems represent what is archetypal so many readers can relate to them. The reader should be able to find a way into a poem without feeling that there is some elusive meaning that they might miss.

10. **Do you have any advice for new writers/authors?**

Read, read, and read as much as you possibly can. Read to find what surprises you, read for what stops you in your tracks, read for what you wish you had written. Read.

11. **What is the best advice (about writing) you have ever heard?**

It isn’t the product of the poem itself, but the process of writing it that matters.

12. **How many books do you read annually and what are you reading now? What is your favorite literary genre?**

Books are everywhere piled up in our house and on our iPads. I read more poetry than fiction or nonfiction. Each week I wait for the latest poems in *The New Yorker* that Kevin Younghas selected. He is a phenomenal editor, and the work he selects most often surprises.

Books I am reading now: *The Now: Poems, Albert Goldbarth; The Best American Poetry 2019 David Lehman; Hawks on Wires: Poems, Dave Smith; The Pain Trader, Poems, James Fowler; How a Poem Moves, Adam Sol; The Tiny Journalist, Naomi Shihab Nye; Summer Snow, Robert Haas; Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas: A novel, De Assis; 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World, Elif Shafak; Writers and Lovers, A novel, Lily King;*

13. **What do you deem the most relevant about your writing? What is the most important to be remembered by readers?**

I have a poem titled *My Lyric Life* that speaks to finding beauty and what is lyric in the ordinary world. What is lyric and beautiful can be found anywhere in a quark, a bee sting, a scam, a hyena stripping bones of flesh, a leaking roof, arbitrage, Asian tree peonies, a swamp, misdirections, various dimensions of love, of death and it goes on.

14. **What is your opinion about the publishing industry today and about the ways authors can best fit into the new trends?**

Writing poems has most often not been a way to earn a living or feed children. On the other side, publishers of poetry work incredibly hard to make work available to readers, but don’t reap huge profits. Old contest models of manuscript submissions for the price of reading fee, where one book would be published out of hundreds submitted have survived by incorporating rules barring conflicts of interest, but they remain limited in number and scope of what is published. Twenty years ago I thought that the internet as a distribution system would change everything, and it seems to me it has in many ways for small press journals. Not having to print and mail copies to subscribers has reduced expenses and put the emphasis on choosing and posting excellent poems. In terms of books, the emergence of hybrid models of publishing that partner authors and publishers in distribution and marketing, as well as social media are what will help poetry to survive in print and digital formats. In the current economic climate, both publishers and authors will continue to be challenged to innovate and reinvent hybrid publishing models.